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ABSTRACT

Antecedents and consequences of adolescent parenting were examined using a representative national sample of 1,000 adults, selected from the 1960 Project TALENT participants. Three- to four-hour interviews were conducted with these adults. Out of the total group, 10% of the men and 31% of the women had had a child during adolescence. Higher incidence of adolescent parenting occurred among blacks, low socioeconomic status, and low ability groups. Consequences were observed in terms of various life circumstances and each individual's status on an empirically-derived set of 15 factors defining quality of life. The many negative consequences resulting from young parenthood made it clear that programs to assist young parents must be initiated and maintained. Specific recommendations include, first, offering counseling or courses in sex education and family living; and second, developing programs to allow and encourage young parents to continue their education. (Author)

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Antecedents and Consequences of Adolescent Parenting[1]

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For the entire population of the United States, the birth rate has generally been declining since 1960; however, this decline has not been uniform across all age groups. The slowest rate of decline occurred among adolescents; indeed, among women aged 10 to 14 between 1960 and 1973, the birth rate has increased by over 60%. Over 20 million women aged 10 to 19 gave birth during 1974, accounting for nearly 20% of the annual births in the United States. During this same time period the illegitimacy rates for teenagers have more than doubled, while the illegitimacy rates for older age groups have increased slightly or not at all. Adolescent childbearing remains a problem that may have serious consequences for the parents, the child, and society as a whole.

Until very recently, the major emphasis of research studies on childbearing concerned the impact of illegitimacy, premarital pregnancy, and early marriage on the parents. These studies focused on the educational, economic, marital, and familial consequences for the young couple (e.g., Monahan, 1960; Glick, 1963; Stine, Rider, & Sweeney, 1964; Rele, 1965; Freedman & Coombs, 1966a,b; Bumpass, 1969; Coombs & Zumeta, 1970; Coombs et al, 1970; Freedman & Coombs, 1970; Ridley, 1971; Busfield, 1972; Foltz, Klerman, & Jekel, 1972; Bumpass & Sweet, 1972; Ross & Sawhill, 1975; Westoff, 1975; Sawhill, 1975).

Turning to the situation of the teenager, we find that some questions have been and are being investigated. Zelnick and Kanner (1972, 1974) reported on findings regarding the sexual behavior of a national sample of adolescent females aged 15 to 19. Their results indicated that premarital sex is beginning at younger ages. Indeed, nearly half of all teenagers experienced premarital sex, and pregnancy resulted for about a third of these women. However, the fertility and fertility control behaviors of these young women varied according to certain background and social characteristics. For example, at every age from 15 to 19, unmarried women from poor families were more likely to experience intercourse and less likely to use contraceptives than were unmarried women from wealthier families.

For many years studies have documented the negative influence of teenage pregnancy on educational attainment. A study by the U. S. Department of Labor (1965) examined the reasons reported for leaving high school prior to graduation. Of all female drop outs in 1963, 38 parent of Whites and 49 parent of Non-Whites left school because of pregnancy. Pregnancy continues to remain as the most important reason for female dropouts, according to the National School Public Relations Association (1972). A high school dropout may, of course, return to school to complete his/her education. Indeed, Presser (1974, 1975 a,b) reported that teenage mothers were more likely to be in school at the time of the interview than were older mothers, and their educational aspirations were similar to those held prior to pregnancy. However, the final level of educational attainment may still be lower for the adolescent parent. Furstenberg's comparison (1975) of adolescent mothers with their classmates indicated that, at the time of the five-year follow-up, only 49 percent of the adolescent mothers (aged 15 to 19) had graduated from high school as compared with over 85 percent of their classmates. Unfortunately, this result is limited to a five-year follow-up of women living in Baltimore, Maryland. Given the restrictions on the sample and on the time period covered, further investigations of this relationship should be conducted.

According to Trussell (1976), human capital theory predicts a positive association between educational attainment, occupational status, and labor force participation. [See Blau and Duncan (1967), Duncan, Featherman and Duncan (1972); and Sewell and Hauser (1975) for a discussion of the relationships between educational, occupational, and wage attainment.] If early pregnancy restricts a person's education, then a negative impact should result in both occupational status and labor force participation. Unfortunately few studies provide research focusing on these relationships. In her study of adolescent mothers in New York City, Presser (1974; 1975 a,b) reported that fewer adolescent mothers were employed as compared with the older mothers; however, as we noted earlier, many of the adolescent mothers were still in school. Furstenberg (1976), however, found in comparing adolescent mothers with their classmates that the adolescent mothers were less likely to be employed and more likely to be on welfare. Although these women reported a preference for work, available work was low paid because of limited education, inexperience, and sex and racial discrimination; in fact, some jobs did not pay enough to cover the costs of childcare. Again, further research is needed to clarify the relationship of education, occupation, labor force participation, and income for both men and women who are adolescent parents.

Age at marriage is a powerful determinant of marital stability. Pregnancy may cut short the period of adolescent courtship and hasten an early marriage. Among the Baltimore sample (Furstenberg, 1976), almost one quarter of the adolescent mothers were married by the time of birth, and almost half of them were married within two years after the birth. Numerous problems confront these couples. Presser (1975), for example, discussed the problem of having little time to adjust to the role of spouse as distinct from the role of parent. Economic problems have been discussed previously. Since economic resources correlate postively with marital stability (Scanzoni, 1970; Cutwright, 1971; Furstenberg, 1974), we may expect to find frequent marital problems among the adolescent parents. Results from the Baltimore study indicated that approximately 60 percent of these couples had separated within five years of their marriage. As this study was limited to a five-year follow-up, a complete picture with regard to the stability of such unions is not presented.

In addition to experience problems in terms of education, work, income, and marriage, early parenthood is associated with repeated pregnancy (Sarrel, 1960; Menken, 1972; Miller, 1973). Evaluations of family planning programs indicated a high rate of repeated pregnancies in the teenage years (Siegel et al, 1971; Jorgensen, 1973; Klerman and Jekel, 1973). This appears to result from unplanned pregnancies rather than from a desire to have children. In the sample of New York mothers (Presser, 1975 a,b), teen mothers had family size desires similar to those of older mothers; however, the former were less likely to plan the births. Only 20 percent of the adolescent mothers as compared with 70 percent of the mothers aged 24 to 29 had planned the birth. Furstenberg (1976) found that within five years of the first birth, the adolescent mothers, as a whole, had more children than their classmates. He stated that these results indicated that the "innoculation approach" followed by family planning clinics needed to be revised; rather, these clinics should continue to actively support the contraceptive behaviors of these young mothers for several years following the first pregnancy.

Turning to the psychological consequences of adolescent childbearing, we find the literature to be even more scanty. Lieberman (1975) noted that young parents find themselves in an extremely stressful situation, which may impair their nurturing behavior (Dickens, 1974) and cause psychological problems (Gabrielson). As we have already noted, information on the aspirations of these young people has been limited to the educational and familial areas (Presser, 1975 a,b; Furstenberg, 1976).

Although attitudes toward life is a psychological dimension that must be affected by adolescent pregnancy (Lieberman, 1975), none of the studies on adolescent pregnancy and childbearing has included an in-depth examination of the young parents' reflections on the past, their attitudes toward the present, and their plans and goals for the future. As we have seen, many of the studies have demonstrated an impact on dimension affecting quality of life, such as material comforts, occupational role, and relationship with spouse.

Although the above-cited studies have improved our knowledge in this area, several methodology and content gaps become immediately apparent upon reviewing the literature. Few studies exist that examine both antecedents and consequences of adolescent childbearing. None of these studies is based on data from representative national samples. Few studies conduct analyses of long-term consequences. In-depth information from extensive interviews, allowing for quantitative and qualitative analyses, is only rarely collected. Studies that do examine the antecedents of childbearing concentrate on the woman and usually neglect any examination of the effects on the man. Even those studies focusing on the women have their limitations, in that few consider the impact of adolescent childbearing on factors related to the quality of life.

The present paper will attempt to bridge many of these gaps by examining several antecedents and consequences of adolescent childbearing on both men and women. The model underlying this work links demographic-background and aptitude measures as a teenager with adolescent childbearing behavior. This, in turn, affects objective measures of life situation, such as educational, occupational, and familial outcomes, as well as subjective measures of life situation, such as quality of life.

Defining and Assessing Quality of Life

In order to determine impact on individual quality of life, it is necessary to have a criterion measure of quality of life. The criterion measure used in the present study is a set of empirically-derived factors comprising the quality of life. These components were identified using 6,500 critical incidents gathered from a national sample of over 2,800 men and women of different age, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. The incidents reported specific behaviors or experiences that had a significant positive or negative effect on a person's quality of life. The incidents were categorized into 15 factors as shown in Figure 1.

To assess present quality of life, a second sample of individuals was contacted. This sample consisted of representative national samples of 500 men and 500 women about 30 years of age. These 1,000 men and women were selected from a special group of the 1960 Project TALENT participants who were representative of all 15-year-olds in 1960 (whether they were in elementary, junior high, high school, or were out of school). A three- to four-hour structured interview was conducted with each person in the sample. The interview gathered information on (a) personal characteristics and background, (b) family status and relationships, (c) occupation, (d) economic condition, (e) health condition of self and family, (f) friends and socializing, (g) leisure activities and interests, (h) personal evaluation of life, and (i) interviewer's impressions. In addition, each person rated the importance and satisfaction of each of the 15 quality of life factors.

Antecedents and Consequences of Adolescent Childbearing

To examine both antecedents to and consequences of adolescent childbearing and parenting, analyses were conducted using the sample of the 1,000 30-year-olds. Group analyses as well as case-history analyses were undertaken. The group analyses used the data from all of the adolescent parents. Of the 1,000 30-year-olds, 10% of the men (N = 51) and 31% of the women (N = 155) had a child before the age of 20. For a variety of case-history analyses, the sample of 1,000 was divided into comparable samples of 50 men and 50 women. One of the subsamples was examined, from which a total of 8 male cases (16%) and 16 female cases (32%) were identified as adolescent parents. It will be from these cases that the case-history analyses will be developed.

The discussion will now turn to an examination of the background characteristics associated with adolescent parenting. Then, some of the consequences will be considered. The last section of this paper will suggest possible approaches to reducing the negative consequences for early parenting.

Background characteristics. Certain background characteristics, measured at age 15, appeared to be related to a higher incidence of adolescent parenting. These characteristics included race, socioeconomic status (SES), family situation, and ability level. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

More blacks than whites experienced early childbirth and parenting. Twenty-four percent of the black men as compared with 10% of the white men and 55% of the black women as compared with 29% of the white women had a child during adolescence.

To examine the relationship between SES and age at birth of first child, an index for SES was created from the 1960 responses to questions regarding the value of the home owned by the student's family, the family's total income, the number of books in the home, the possession of certain articles in the home, and the parents' occupations and levels of education. The resulting SES values were then grouped into quintiles. The distributions showed that 11% of the men and 45% of the women in the lowest SES quintile were adolescent parents; on the other hand, only 4% of the men and 17% of the women in the highest SES quintile were among the adolescent childbearers.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL WELL-BEING

A. Material well-being and financial security

Having good food, home, possessions, comforts, and expectations of these for the future. Money and financial security are typically important factors. For most people filling these needs is primarily related to their efforts or those of their spouse.

B. Health and personal safety

Enjoying freedom from sickness, possessing physical and mental fitness, avoiding accidents and other health hazards. Problems related to alcohol, drugs, death, and aging are also included. Effective treatment of health problems is a large component.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER PEOPLE

C. Relations with spouse (girlfriend or boyfriend)

Being married or having a girlfriend or boyfriend. The relationship involves love, companionship, sexual satisfaction, understanding, communication, appreciation, devotion, and contentment.

D. Having and raising children

Having children and becoming a parent. This relationship involves watching their development, spending time with them and enjoying them. Also included are things like molding, guiding, helping, appreciating, and learning from them and with them.

E. Relations with parents, siblings, or other relatives

Having parents, siblings, or other relatives. In these relationships one experiences communicating with or doing things with them, visiting, enjoying, sharing, understanding, being helped by and helping them. The feeling of belonging and having someone to discuss things with is a large component.

F. Relations with friends

Having close friends. In these relationships one shares activities, interests and views. Important aspects of these relationships involve being accepted, visiting, giving and receiving help, love, trust, support, and guidance.

SOCIAL, COMMUNITY, AND CIVIC ACTIVITIES

G. Activities related to helping or encouraging other people

Helping or encouraging adults or children (other than relatives or close friends). This can be done through one's efforts as an individual or as a member of some organization, such as a church, club, or volunteer group, that works for the benefit of other people.

H. Activities relating to local and national governments

Keeping informed through the media; participating by voting and other communications; having and appreciating one's political, social, and religious freedom. One component of this includes having living conditions affected by regulation, laws, procedures, and policies of governing agencies and the individuals and groups that influence and operate them.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FULFILLMENT

I. Intellectual development

Learning, attending school, acquiring desired knowledge and mental abilities, graduating, and problem solving. Other aspects involve improving understanding, comprehension or appreciation in an intellectual area through activities in or out of school.

J. Personal understanding and planning

Developing and gaining orientation, purpose, and guiding principles for one's life. This may involve becoming more mature, gaining insight into and acceptance of one's assets and limitations, experiencing and awareness of personal growth and development, and realizing the ability to influence the course of one's life significantly. It also includes making decisions and planning life activities and roles. For some people, a major component arises from religious or spiritual experiences or activities.

K. Occupational role (job)

Having interesting, challenging, rewarding, worthwhile work in a job or home. This includes doing well, using one's abilities, learning and producing, obtaining recognition, and accomplishing on the job.

L. Creativity and personal expression

Showing ingenuity, originality, imagination in music, art, writing, handicrafts, drama, photography, practical or scientific matters or everyday activities. This also includes expressing oneself through a collection, a personal project, or an accomplishment or achievement.

RECREATION

M. Socializing

Entertaining at home or elsewhere, attending parties or other social gatherings, meeting new people, interacting with others. It may include participation in socializing organizations and clubs.

N. Passive and observational recreational activities

Participating in various kinds of passive recreation, such as watching television, listening to music, reading, going to the movies, and going to entertainment or sports events. It also involves appreciating the art and beauty in many aspects of life.

O. Active and participatory recreational activities

Participating in various kinds of active recreation, such as sports, hunting, fishing, boating, camping, vacation travel, and sightseeing, etc. This may also involve playing sedentary or active games, singing, playing an instrument, dancing, acting, etc.

Figure 1. Components Composing Personal Quality of Life

further confirmation of this trend appears in the case-history analysis. For example, among the sample of men, all of them reported a low income level for this family (i.e., a response of either "barely able to make a living" or "had the necessities"). Thus, it appears that persons from low SES backgrounds are more likely to be adolescent parents.

In addition to SES level, a difficult family or parental situation appeared to characterize the early lives of these men and women. Turning to the case-history analysis, we find that four of the eight men and ten of the sixteen women reported some stressful situation in their family. These circumstances included alcoholism in one or both of the parents, separation or divorce of the parents, abandonment by one of the parents, death of one of the parents, and chronic ailments afflicting one or both of the parents. Such situations did not create a happy home environment for these young persons.

Finally, low ability scores, as measured by the 1960 TALENT tests were received by many of the adolescent parents. Focusing on the Reading Comprehension score received by these students, we find that 13% of the men in the lowest two quintiles, as compared with 8% of the men in the highest two quintiles were adolescent parents. Among the women, 44% of those in the lowest two quintiles, as compared with only 18% in the highest two quintiles had children during their teenage years.

As an example of the early life of one of the women in the adolescent childbearing group, let us examine the case of Julia Dixon (a ficticious name).

> Julia, a black female, grew up in an urban area in one of the Middle Attlantic states. Her father abandoned the family when she was about four years old, and she reports that he was murdered when she was 16. Her mother tried to provide for the many children in the family, but she was barely able to make a living. Julia received very low scores on the TALENT tests. Her highest score was in Quantitative Reasoning, a stanine score of 3, and her Reading Comprehension score was a stanine of 1.

Consequences. The most immediate consequence of adolescent parenting, particularly for women, was termination of school attendance. "Pregnancy and marriage" was most frequently reported among the 500 women in this sample as a reason for leaving high school (i.e., 47% of the women who dropped out of school). Among our selected case histories, we find that six of the eight males dropped out of school and that two listed "pregnancy" as a reason. For the females, seven of the sixteen cases dropped out of school, and five of the seven listed "pregnancy" as a reason.

Dropping out of school does not necessarily mean that the person will never return to school; it may merely delay the receipt of the high school diploma. Among the six men who dropped out, four have received a G.E.D. or a high school diploma, one is working on a G.E.D., and the last one is in technical school. However, none of the seven women who dropped out of school have returned. Turning to the quality of life dimension of intellectual development, we find that slightly more of the adolescent parenting group than the total sample rate it as important or very important (86% of the

adolescent parenting group, as compared with 84% of the entire sample of 30-year-olds). On the other hand, fewer of these young parents indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current status on the dimension (47% of the adolescent parents, as compared with 54% of the entire sample).

The level of education received by a man or woman affects the kind of job that he or she may be able to secure. Among the men and among eight of the women who are employed, only one man holds a professional position. The remainder of the men and women are employed in low-level and low-paying positions. In terms of the quality of life dimension of occupational role, we find that 90% of the adolescent parents indicate that this dimension is important or very important (as do 90% of the entire sample). However, only 72% of the adolescent childbearers, as compared with 79% of the total sample, report a high level of satisfaction. The ratings on the dimension of material well-being and financial security indicate that more of the adolescent parents consider it to be important or very important--87% as compared with 77% for all 30-year-olds; at the same time, fewer of these young parents rate themselves as being satisfied or very satisfied--61% as compared with 75% for the entire group of 30-year-olds.

Having children at a young age also appears to be related to certain marital and family patterns. Twenty-five percent of the adolescent parents are currently separated or divorced, as compared with only 11% of the entire sample. Their ratings of the quality of life dimension of relations with a spouse indicate that the dimension is less important to them than to the entire sample of the 30-year-olds, with only 86% of the young-parent group giving a high rating of importance was compared with 92% for the entire sample. At the same time, the adolescent-parent group indicates a level of satisfaction similar to that for the entire group, with 82% of both groups giving a high rating. It should be mentioned here that most of the separated and divorced persons have a close relationship with another man or woman.

Not only do the adolescent parents begin having children at an earlier age, they also have more children. The average number of children for the adolescent parents at age 30 is three, while for the remainder of the 30-year-olds who have children, the average number is two. We find that the adolescent parents place a high level of importance on the dimension of relations with children; 95% of the adolescent parents as compared with 88% of all the 30-year-olds rate this dimension as important or very important. However, these young parents also indicate a lower level of satisfaction with the dimension. Only 74% of this group as compared with 82% of all the 30-year-olds rate this with a high level of satisfaction. Among the adolescent-parent cases, several men and women indicate that the failure of their marriage has led to reduced financial provisions for their children or reduced contact with their children.

marriage has led to reduced financial provisions for their children or reduced contact with their children.

In questions regarding disappointments and turning points in life, many of the adolescent-parent cases (79%) reported that they regretted having children at such an early age. They now see many of the negative consequences of that action.

Recommendations. Viewing many of the negative consequences resulting from young parenthood, it is clear that programs to assist these young people must be initiated and maintained. In order to consider two specific programs, we will focus on the experiences or recommendations of some of the adolescent parents that we have just been examining.

1. Counseling or courses in sex education and family living. One young man among the adolescent parent group indicated that such counseling might have helped him. Learning "a little more of life in general" would have pleased Willie Regan (a ficticious name), a black whose parents were separated because of his father's alcoholism. He feels that this would have helped in finding out "what to look for in a man or woman." He thinks that sex "should be explained" in high school to avoid marriages which get "messed up in the wrong way." According to Willie, doctors should teach sex education with an emphasis on "bodies, not so much V.D." Given that many of these young people, including Willie, have not experienced a happy home life, such courses should focus on approaches to maintaining a happy marriage and home.

2. Programs to allow and encourage young parents to continue their education. As stated previously, many of these young parents left school early. Some, such a Julia Dixon who was described earlier, were forced to leave school. Julia, for example, was not allowed to return to school, unless she gave up her child for adoption. Others, though not forced to leave school, did drop out, because of the demands of parenthood and the lack of encouragement to remain in school.

The case of Roger Baldwin provides a clear example that by completing one's education, adolescent parenthood does not need to result in a poor quality of life.

> Roger Baldwin had to get married right after graduating from high school. The negative opinions about him and his wife at this point made them work together to succeed. He enrolled in a state university after high school, and he graduated nine years later with a B.A. in business administration. During that time, he worked in the day and went to school at night. Currently he is working as the corporate manager of finance for a chemical company and is in the process of completing a MBA. He reports a high level of satisfaction in his intellectual development, his occupational role, his material well-being, his relations with his wife, and his relations with his children.

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